



The Holy See

**LETTER OF THE HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION
ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR CHILDREN***

*To His Excellency Javier Pérez de Cuellar
Secretary General of the United Nations Organization
on the occasion of the World Summit for Children*

"Your children will be like olive shoots around your table" (Ps. 128(127), 3).

These simple words of the Psalmist speak of children as a great blessing from God and a source of intense joy for the family.

Inspired by this positive view of human life, the Holy See applauds the *World Summit for Children* as an important expression and consolidation of the increased awareness which has been shown by public opinion and States regarding the need to do much more to safeguard the well-being of the world's children, to enunciate the rights of the child and to protect those rights through cultural and legislative actions imbued with respect for human life as a value in itself, independently of sex, ethnic origin, social or cultural status, or political or religious conviction. Not being able personally to take part in the Summit, I extend warmest greetings to you, Mr Secretary General, and to the distinguished Heads of State and of Government present. Confident that the achievements of the human race are a sign of God's greatness and the fulfilment of his mysterious design, I ardently invoke divine light and wisdom upon your deliberations.

I am pleased to express the appreciation of the Catholic Church for all that has been and is being done under the auspices of the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies to guarantee the survival, health, protection and integral development of children, the most defenceless of our brothers and sisters, the most innocent and deserving sons and daughters of our common Father in heaven. The Holy See's prompt accession to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* adopted

by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 1989 accords with the Catholic Church's bi-millenary tradition of service to those in material or spiritual need, especially the weaker members of the human family, among whom children have always received special attention. In the Child of Bethlehem, Christians contemplate the uniqueness, the dignity and the need for love of every child. In the example and teaching of her Founder, the Church perceives a mandate to devote special care to the needs of children (Cfr. *Marc.* 10,14); indeed, in the Christian view, our treatment of children becomes a measure of our fidelity to the Lord himself (Cfr. *Matth.* 18,5).

The Church has a vivid perception of the immense burden of suffering and injustice borne by the children of the world. In my own ministry and pastoral journeys, I am a witness of the heartbreaking plight of millions of children in every continent. They are most vulnerable, because they are least able to make their voice heard. My contribution to this *Summit*, Mr Secretary General, is meant to reinforce before this powerful Assembly the often wordless but no less legitimate and insistent appeal which the children of the world address to those who have the means and the responsibility to make better provision for them.

The children of the world cry out for love. In this case love stands for the real concern of one human being for another, for the good that each owes to the other in the bond of our common humanity. A child cannot survive physically, psychologically and spiritually without the solidarity which makes us all responsible for all, a responsibility which assumes particular intensity in the self-giving love of parents for their offspring.

The Holy See attributes particular significance to the fact that the *Convention* recognizes *the irreplaceable role of the family* in fostering the growth and well-being of its members. The family is the first and vital cell of society because of its service to life and because it is the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself. The well-being of the world's children therefore depends greatly on the measures taken by States to support and help families to fulfil their natural life-giving and formative functions.

The children of the world cry out for greater respect for their inalienable individual dignity and for their right to life from the first moment of conception, even in the face of difficult circumstances or personal handicap. Every individual, no matter how small or how seemingly unimportant in utilitarian terms, bears the imprint of the Creator's image and likeness (Cfr. *Gen* 1,26). Policies and actions which do not recognize that unique condition of innate dignity cannot lead to a more just and humane world, for they go against the very values which determine objective moral categories and which form the basis of rational moral judgments and right actions.

The *International Convention on the Rights of the Child* constitutes a statement of priorities and obligations which can serve as a reference point and stimulus for action on behalf of children everywhere. The Holy See gladly acceded to and endorses the *Convention* on the understanding

that goals, programmes and actions stemming from it will respect the moral and religious convictions of those to whom they are directed, in particular the moral convictions of parents regarding the transmission of life, with no urging to resort to means which are morally unacceptable, as well as their freedom in relation to the religious life and education of their children. Children who are to learn to be supportive of their fellow man must learn the reality of mutually supportive relationships in the family itself, where there is profound respect for all human life, unborn as well as born, and where both *mother and father jointly make responsible decisions regarding the exercise of their parenthood*.

During the International Year of the Child in 1979 I had the opportunity of addressing the UN General Assembly. I repeat today, with increased emphasis, the conviction and hope I manifested at that time "No country on earth, no political system can think of its own future otherwise than through the image of these new generations that will receive from their parents the manifold heritage of values, duties and aspirations of the nation to which they belong and of the whole human family. Concern for the child, even before birth, from the first moment of conception and then throughout the years of infancy and youth, is the primary and fundamental test of the relationship of one human being to another. And so, what better wish can I express for every nation and for the whole of mankind, and for all the children of the world than *a better future* in which respect for human rights will become a complete reality" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Nationum Unitarum Legatos*, 21, die 2 oct.1979: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II, 2 (1979) 538).

May Almighty God lead this Summit to lay a solid juridical foundation for the achievement of such a reality!

From the Vatican, September 22, 1990.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

*AAS 83 (1991), p. 358-361.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XIII, 2 p. 671-674.

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